

Discover, Create, Share and Apply- Thinking Beyond the “Brief”

**Discover, Create, Share, and Apply- Thinking Beyond the “Brief”**  
An Analysis and Discussion of the College of Education and Human Development’s  
Internal Communication Strategy

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### Abstract

To overcome communication barriers, O'Dell and Grayson, authors of the book, *If Only We Knew What We Know-The Transfer of Internal Knowledge and Best Practice*, suggest the adoption of a strong intention and a methodical approach to internal communication (O'Dell, 1998, pg. 20). In order to implement this process, an organization must have a persuasive need to change, a clear-eyed evaluation of the current internal communication plan, a detailed strategy with an ongoing management plan, and a strong implementation plan (O'Dell, 1998, pg. 20). From this suggestion, the current management plan was analyzed and a research study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the current internal communication strategy for the College of Education and Human Development. Before the research was conducted, literature was reviewed to better understand barriers to internal communication and important elements to building a strong management plan. From this information, a study was created to answer the research question, *how well is the internal communications strategy at the College of Education and Human Development currently performing?* Four intensive interviews were conducted, a focus group was held, and a sixteen-question survey was disseminated to CEHD employees to discover the overall impression of the college's strategy, to learn organizational barriers, and understand perceived individual communication proficiency. The results indicated that a lack of organizational understanding and a perceived disconnect between upper and lower positions are hindering good communication from occurring. Participants also displayed a misperception of communication proficiency amongst their peers, indicating an individual barrier to effective communication practices. However, positive results about supervisor communication can provide an outlet through which to overcome communication barriers. From the results and with the literature surrounding the construction of a strong management plan, suggestions to improve and promote better communication practices will be presented. The college's mission statement will act as the foundation from which these recommendations will develop. An awareness campaign will be launched to promote and explain the new endeavor and a training program will be presented to provide employees with the necessary tools and information to be good communicators. The strategy will require hard work and time from all employees of the college but if implemented and strongly supported, there is no limit to the amount of success CEHD could gain.

### Dedications

This paper is dedicated to my wonderful family, friends, and fiancé. I would not be where I am today without your undying love and support.

To Cohort 7, may we look back at this time with fond memories and continue to be close colleagues and friends.

For those who participated and supported this study, I express my tremendous gratitude and appreciation. Without you this would not have been possible.

### About the Author

The University of Minnesota has been an influential entity in Kelly Valusek’s life for almost eight years. As a student of the University, Kelly pursued a diverse set of degrees from a B.A. in Art History to minors in both Business Management and Spanish. Her decision to pursue a M.A. in Strategic Communication provided the perfect avenue to integrate her undergraduate knowledge.

As an employee, Kelly Valusek has worked for the College of Education and Human Development for approximately four years. Her first full time position was as a financial processor for the St. Paul departments of CEHD. While learning the ins and outs of the University’s financial system, she was also learning the ups and downs of colleague relationships and office communication. After three years, Kelly moved into an office manager role at a research center within CEHD. Communication became an integral element in every aspect of her work and a main source for her success, as well as stress.

For this project, Kelly decided to take from her business management knowledge and work in strategic communication to investigate the internal communication strategy of the College of Education and Human Development. She wishes to identify possible areas of development that could not only improve her position as office manager but support communications among all employees of the college. Kelly plans to share her results with the college and possibly the University in hopes of giving back to the organization that has provided so much to her for nearly a decade.

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## Introduction

The University of Minnesota is an extensive network of colleges, each with their own academic departments, research centers, athletic facilities and/or service branches. Remaining informed about important changes within and among these areas is extremely important to the success of University employees. However, this task can be very difficult to achieve. Specifically at the College of Education and Human Development, good internal communication is critical to maintain cohesion and motivation amongst 1,279 employees housed in eight academic departments and seven research centers. When strong internal communication practices are not implemented properly, the consequences can be office gossip, low employee productivity and decreased employee support for the organization. So what is internal communications and why is it so important? “In the simplest terms, internal communications is communication within an organization,” according to Phil Rabinowitz, the author of *Promoting Internal Communications* for the University of Kansas “It encompasses both ‘official’ communication- memos, guidelines, policies and procedures- and ‘unofficial’ communication that goes among and between the staff members” (Rabinowitz, 2013, pg. 1). Beyond the technical term, internal communications is seen as the very means to the success of the organization. “[Internal communications] is the lifeblood of any organization, the way in which everyone gets the information they need” (Rabinowitz, 2013, pg. 1).

The current internal communication strategy for the college consists of a variety of communication frameworks without a visible overarching theme or purpose for their existence. To better understand these various frameworks, James

and Larissa Grunig’s, “Toward a Theory of the Public Relations Behavior of Organizations: Review of a Program of Research” (Grunig & Grunig, 1989, pg. 27). will be applied. According to Grunig, there are four styles utilized in public relations communication. Press agency, or one-way asymmetrical communication, describes the practice of presenting propagandistic and attention seeking information (Grunig & Grunig, 1989, pg. 27). The second framework is public information, or one-way symmetrical communication, where information provided is accurate but does not seek audience input (Grunig & Grunig, 1989, pg. 27). Third, is two-way asymmetrical communication where only information likely to gain support from the audience is presented (Grunig & Grunig, 1989, pg. 27). Lastly, Two-way symmetrical communication is the practice of negotiation as a means to appeal to both sides and implement meaningful change (Grunig & Grunig, 1989, pg. 27). According to James and Larissa Grunig (1989), two-way symmetrical communication is the most effective means of communication.

Starting with what appears to be CEHD’s main form of college wide communication, the “Burton Brief” appears to be a form of one-way asymmetrical communication. The “Burton Brief” is a weekly e-newsletter modeled from the University wide internal communication recommendations. These recommendations were created in 2009 as a University wide initiative to reinvent internal communications (Freeman, 2009, pg. 2). The “brief” is a promotional communication tool utilized by the University and recommended to colleges for their mass internal communication needs. Sent by the Communications Department Director for CEHD, the “Burton Brief” begins with a statement from the Dean and the

“Dean’s app of the week” to promote the technology initiative of the college. The rest of the brief includes department or center achievements as well as awards or recognition received by faculty or staff. When available, new job postings and important dates appear at the end of the newsletter.

The second main outlet for internal communications within the college is the CEHD intranet. Recently updated and renamed the “Sky”, the CEHD intranet provides internal web space for each department or center to post information necessary for faculty and staff. The main college page of the “Sky” provides direct links to employee services, the financial and human resources pages, the internal facilities page and the technology and communication internal sites. This main page also displays a link titled “CEHD Leadership” which provides a brief overview of the mission statement and organizational chart of the college. Taking a closer look at the internal page for the communications department, resources such as web-site guidelines, brand management, and publicity tips appear to be the majority of the information included. Overall, the “Sky” uses the public information framework that is intended to provide access to college information and resources to all employees while not seeking any input as to what is provided.

Another e-newsletter titled “Friday Connection” began as a means for financial news to circulate to staff with financial duties. It has now grown to include all news about finance, human resources and facilities. The Principle Office Manager of the Dean’s office sends out this newsletter, and those interested in receiving it must request to be on the mailing list. The “Friday Connection” is another communication outlet using the public information framework. The e-mail provides

useful information for employees but does not offer an opportunity for employee input. A fourth communication outlet for the college is two college-wide events a year for all staff and faculty to attend and engage in face-to-face communication. Although this may appear to foster two-way symmetrical communication, the events are more asymmetrical. The information presented at these events is designed to gain employee support rather than engage in negotiation practices. The only opportunity provided by the college for two-way symmetrical communication is in the form of group meetings. These meetings are encouraged but neither regulated nor mandatory and there is no determination if negotiation is occurring or if information is simply presented for employee support. From this overview, the internal communications strategy of the college appears to be heavily focused on one-way communication practices that can hinder the relationships and success of their employees. This overview provides a persuasive reason to further evaluate the current internal communication strategy and discover areas upon which to build a stronger strategy that fosters more two-way symmetrical communication.

Understanding of the definition and importance for internal communications as well as CEHD’s current internal communication strategy provides the platform for further research and discussion. Next, the paper will set out to understand barriers to implementing a successful internal communication strategy, psychological drivers for good communication, and elements to building a strong communications strategy before creating a study to gain a deeper evaluation of the current internal communication strategy for CEHD. The study will consist of a survey, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group with CEHD employees to collect



data for analysis. From the results, means to enhance the current communication strategy will be presented and implemented through an suggested awareness campaign and a communication-training program.

## Literature Review

“The first public of any organization is its employees- the people who make it what it is” (Center, 2013, pg. 21). With employees being such an important part of any organization, the need for strong internal communications is apparent. However, the art of internal communications remains misunderstood, perplexing, and burdensome. This section will begin with a review of select literature focusing on both organizational and individual barriers to implementing a strong communication strategy within any organization. Understanding these critical obstacles to effective internal communication will provide a strong platform from which to further analyze the internal communication strategy for the College of Education and Human Development. A second set of literature will be reviewed to discover elements of successful management plans and training programs for internal communication strategies. These articles will be studied to aid in the development of an enhanced communication strategy and a successful implementation plan.

### Organizational Barriers to Internal Communications

This section discusses two pieces of literature that present various organizational barriers to knowledge transfer. Cheney et al. (2001) provides with an

overview of four elements to organizational structure. The first, hierarchy, refers to the distribution of authority within the organizational roles (Cheney; Christensen; Zorn; Ganesh, 2011, pg. 20). Second, differentiation and specialization, refers to the number of divisions, departments or specific tasks within the organization (Cheney et al, 2011 pg. 21). The degree to which interactions are characterized by rules and regulations is described as formalization (Cheney et al, 2011 pg. 23). Lastly, time orientation affects an organization in multiple ways such as short versus long-term goals, the sense of urgency in the climate, or implications of shortcuts (Cheney et al, 2011 pg. 23). These elements have much effect on the development of organizational culture and will have a strong impact on the development and implementation of any internal communication strategy.

The most common organizational structure, and the organizational structure of the University of Minnesota, is a bureaucracy (Cheney et al, 2011 pg. 29). A bureaucracy is useful to larger organizations in offering a set of easily learned rules and practices. However, bureaucracies also create a threat to individuality and drive people to concentrate on the little tasks and forget about the bigger picture (Cheney et al, 2011 pg. 31). Within this organizational structure, information is expected to travel from the top, down and many difficulties are experienced with information traveling from the bottom, up. Lack of security and trust, fear, impression management, and the lack of an open door policy are just some reasons why news, particularly bad news, may not be communicated upward in a top-down system (Cheney et al., 2011, pg. 2). In an organizational structure that discourages or even prevents information from traveling up the hierarchy, information may not reach

those who need to be informed. The second piece of literature provides further insight into organizational barriers to effective internal communication.

O’Dell and Grayson (1988) developed an entire chapter of their book on the barriers to internal transfer of knowledge. According to these two writers, there are four barriers to the transfer of information within a system. The organizational barriers mentioned are “no absorptive capacity” and “lack of preexisting relationships.” The concept of “no absorptive capacity” suggests that even when employees were aware of the information, they lack certain resources such as time and money to make the information useful (O’Dell & Grayson, 1998, pg. 17). The second structural barrier to knowledge transfer is the “lack of preexisting relationships.” Simply put, if there is not a personal bond or time between two employees, they are less likely to engage in sharing information (O’Dell et al, 1998, pg. 17). These obstacles, along with the organizational barriers mentioned by Cheney et al can have strong effects on the flow of internal communication within an organization. The ability of the individual to communicate effectively is also an important element to a strong communication strategy within an organization.

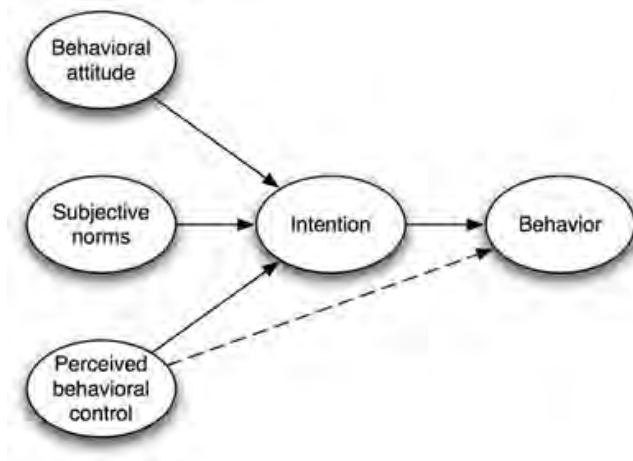
#### Individual Barriers to Internal Communication

Beyond structural barriers, O’Dell and Grayson (1998) suggested two individual barriers to knowledge transfer. The first barrier is ignorance. “Those who have the ‘knowledge’ don’t realize others may find it useful,” writes O’Dell and Grayson, “At the same time, those who could benefit from that ‘knowledge’ have no idea someone in the organization already has it.” (O’Dell & Grayson, 1998, pg. 17)

The second barrier is “lack of motivation”. This indicates that people may not see a clear business reason for transferring their knowledge to others within the organization (O’Dell et al, 1998, pg. 17). These two barriers connect to the theory of planned behavior presented by Icek Ajzen (1985) when analyzing the reasoning for poor knowledge transfer practices.

The theory of reasoned action explains that the precursor of any behavior is the intention to perform the behavior in question (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). The theory indicates two independent determinants of intention, attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm. Behavioral beliefs constitute an individual’s degree of favorability or un-favorability towards the behavior in question, or their attitude toward the behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Normative beliefs drive the subjective norm, or the individual’s perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior (Ajzen et al, 1977). Applying this theory to internal communications, an individual will transfer knowledge if he/she believes the action to be favorable and the social norm is positive towards knowledge transfer. If the culture of the organization is unfavorable towards internal communication or if the individual sees the act of communicating effectively as undesirable, than the individual will most likely refrain from that action. Expanding on the theory of reasoned action, Ajzen created the theory of planned behavior (Image 1). This theory adds a third element to the decision making process, perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control accounts for the individual’s observed ability to carry out the action in question (Ajzen, 1985). In terms of communication,

perceived behavioral control accounts for the level an individual believes he/she can communicate effectively.



Theory of Planned Behavior

(Image 1)

Using the theory of planned behavior, both organizational and individual elements can be analyzed to determine the level of effective communication an employee will perform. If the structural organization of the institution discourages open communication (subjective norms), an individual has a lack of motivation (behavioral attitude), and the individual does not have the absorptive capacity to perform the communication task effectively (perceived behavioral control), the outcome will most likely lead to poor or no communication. Understanding the barriers to effective internal communication and how they relate to each other is important when forming a study to better understand the communication strategy of the College of Education and Human Development.

#### Elements to Internal Communication Management and Training Programs

Understanding the barriers to organizational and individual communication will be utilized to create the study to further analyze the current state of the CEHD

communications strategy. The following pieces of literature will be used in the development of a communication strategy and a communication-training program from the results of the study. Beginning with a very helpful illustration of the foundation for a strong internal communication strategy, Jackson and Welch (2007) identify the organizational strategy as the driver of the organization’s image and identity through which common starting points are utilized to communicate with internal audiences (pg. 179). This graphic suggests that the strategy must promote the values and goals of the organization via multiple contact points with employees. To better communicate with an organization’s internal audience, Welch and Jackson (2007) suggest grouping this audience by occupational classification. From large to small, the classification process starts with all employees, to strategic management, day-to-day management, work teams, and project teams (Jackson & Welch, 2007, pg. 185). While all employee and strategic management communication styles will be predominately one-way, two-way communication will be most successful in day-to-day management, work teams and project teams (Jackson & Welch, 2007, pg. 185). The next article discusses another important component in an internal communication strategy, culture.

Author Barbara Sporn dedicated her research paper to better understanding the definition and management approaches to University culture. Sporn (1996) writes, “Universities are complex organizations with a unique set of features. Unlike many profit-making organizations, universities have certain characteristics that need to be understood and that dominate the culture of academic institutions. First, their goals are ambivalent. Different objectives and standards in teaching, research,

and service as well as lack of agreement on guidelines for goal achievement result in an ambiguous decision-making process.” (pg. 42) This section continues to mention ambiguous goals, a focus on people rather than profits, vulnerability to the environment and experts dominating the decision-making process as elements constituting University culture (Sporn, 1996, pg. 42). To be successful, a performance enhancing culture where highly motivated employees are goal aligned and can adapt to environmental change is necessary (Sporn et al. 1996, pg. 46). In a bureaucracy structure, much like any university, “a strong culture has a high degree of congruence between the values and goals of the organizational member, the hierarchical integration and the strategies.” (Sporn et al, 1996, pg. 46)

A means of instilling these values and goals in the organization can be found in the article by Mark Chong. In his findings, Chong writes, “ [an organization’s] employee communication program is based on the mission and key corporate values of the company.” (Chong, 2007, pg. 205) When employees support the core values of the organization, they display a better appreciation and commitment to their role. Internal communication must empower employees to deliver on the values of the organization (Chong, 2007, pg. 205). If they have a better understanding of the organization’s goals, they will be more likely to support those goals and help the organization succeed. The culture of a university is very unique, but tactics used by other organizations to instill their values and goals in the minds of employees can be beneficial in directing the culture to be focused on success and responsibility.

Communication training programs are a great way to instill organizational values and goals in all employees and create a strong organizational culture focused on success. A brief case study presented by Halley Bock, CEO of Fierce Inc., discusses the implementation of a training program to change an organization’s culture from one of indirect and unproductive communication practices to one that is more open and honest (Bock, 2012, pg. 1). This training program selected seventy managers and eighteen “Fierce champions”, prepared to sustain the knowledge of the program, to complete a two day training where they were taught three conversation models: delegation, confrontation, and coaching (Bock et al, 2012, pg. 1). The delegation conversation model presented tips on how to establish appropriate levels of decision making within the organization (Bock et al, 2012, pg. 1). Confrontation conversation tools emphasized techniques to tackle difficult interpersonal conflicts, and the coaching conversation model provided managers with tools to create an environment of problem solving and collaboration for their employees (Bock et al, 2012, pg. 1). After this training, the “Fierce champions” posted information on the company intranet, chose a “person of the month” who best embodied the communication concepts learned, and held employee meetings to discuss what was learned and to establish goals for the group (Bock et al, 2012, pg. 1). After the initial training program, Fierce Inc. provided follow up training for new employees as well as overview sessions. From before and after survey results, the training program indicated improvement in employee communication that upheld the new cultural values of collaboration and accountability.



Further suggestions for creating a successful communication-training program can be found in the article by Susan Leslie. Leslie conducted a study of three hundred and fifty nine industrial firms to discover common elements to their internal communication training programs (Leslie, 1986, pg. 51). From her analysis, Leslie discovered some interesting trends. Most organizations offered one to three training programs simultaneously. The programs were scheduled during company time and the number of participants ranged from ten to more than fifty (Leslie, 1986, pg. 52). The most common setting was a formal course where writing assessments, practice sets and group discussion were the most successful means of training (Leslie et al, 1986, pg. 54). Topics emphasized in these training programs stressed clarity, conciseness, and organization. Leslie offered recommendations for the creation of a training program based off her findings. Although many of the programs evaluated focused on developing the skills of middle managers, Leslie (1986) suggested replicating these programs to evaluate and train other levels of employees within the organization (pg. 56). Lastly, evaluation of both the training programs themselves as well as the performance of the employees after training appeared to be very significant to the success of the program (Leslie et al, 1986, pg. 54). With a solid structural foundation, understanding of the culture, and framework for an effective training program, a strong internal communications strategy and implementation plan will support the success and sustainability of any organization.

## Research Question

To gain a deeper understanding and evaluation of the internal communication strategy at the College of Education and Human Development the barriers to communication mentioned in the literature above must be considered. The college is a bureaucracy in structure that succeeds in providing stable rules and procedures for every branch it controls. However, a bureaucratic structure like CEHD’s creates barriers to internal communication that put strain on the organization and individual employees. Individual barriers to effective communication can also provide insight to areas of improvement or future support. Beyond a basic assessment of the current communication strategy, the research conducted for this paper will attempt to indicate both organizational and individual barriers of communication within the College of Education and Human Development. Ultimately, the results of the data will be used to answer the research question: *How well is the College of Education and Human development performing in its internal communication strategy?*

## Methodology

The first qualitative research study consisted of four, one-on-one interviews with select employees of CEHD. The employees varied in multiple demographics including position title, department, gender and age. Based on areas of the literature review, the interview questions focused on the individuals’ basic assessment of the internal communications structure at the college, their personal communication

behaviors and perceived organizational barriers to effective communication.

Participants were contacted via an approved e-mail from the Dean’s assistant.

(Appendix A) Held in the private office spaces of the participants at a time most convenient for them, the interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to over one hour and were recorded with receiving consent from the individual. To maintain confidentiality the recordings were later transcribed and all situational and identifying information was removed. An analysis of the transcripts was conducted to identify common phrases, themes, and words associated with communication at CEHD.

A second qualitative research study was held in the form of a focus group. The group consisted of five women holding various positions within the college and the researcher as moderator. The researcher recruited the individuals via an approved e-mail sent to a list of known employees (Appendix A). Participants were presented with a confidentiality information sheet and consent to record the interview was received before the session started. Held over a lunch break and in a convenient private conference room, the focus group began with similar questions as asked in the one-on-one interviews. Using the interview questions as a guideline, the researcher kept the conversation on topic but encouraged more free conversation and attempted to gain deeper insight into the topics willingly brought up by the participants. The focus group lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes. The recording was transcribed and an analysis of the comments was conducted to add to the body of research discovered in the one-on-one interviews.

The transcripts for both the interviews and the focus group are withheld from the research paper to maintain the confidentiality of the individuals involved. Even with names removed, discussions of specific situations may compromise the identity of the individual. To provide a meaningful understanding of the results of the qualitative studies, selected quotes will be mentioned that contain no identifying information as to the participant who said it. It has been extremely important to maintain the trust and privacy of those generous enough to participate in this study.

After the interviews and transcriptions were complete and analyzed, survey questions were created for the quantitative portion of the research study. These questions focused again on the respondent’s opinion of CEHD’s current internal communication strategy, its delivery of necessary information, organizational issues and the individual’s communication proficiency. The survey consisted of sixteen questions; the first question was created to screen out those not employed by the college while the last two questions collected information on age and gender demographics. The questions were entered into the online survey client, [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) and the link was e-mailed by the researcher along with an approved message (Appendix A) to fifteen individuals who disseminated the link to an undetermined number of CEHD staff and faculty. Within two weeks, seventy-four responses were collected and analytical software provided by the survey client was used to determine results. The complete results of each survey question are available in Appendix B.

## Results

The results of the survey were the foundation for the analysis of the current communication practices within the college. The first question was used as a screener to eliminate non-CEHD employees. This was successful in excluding three recipients who were not a part of the college. Question two indicated a positive impression of the college’s communication methods. As seen in Image 2, respondents believed they were informed to their average expectations and felt knowledgeable about CEHD policies and procedures as well as current accomplishments. Those who took the survey did not feel as informed about the college’s strategic direction or issues facing the college.

(Image 2)

Internal Communication Survey



Which of the following best describes your impression of internal communications at CEHD? (Rating: 1 being 'not informative at all' to 5 being 'highly informative')							
	1	2	3	4	5	Rating Average	Rating Count
	2.7% (2)	13.5% (10)	43.2% (32)	32.4% (24)	8.1% (6)	3.30	74
answered question							74
skipped question							3

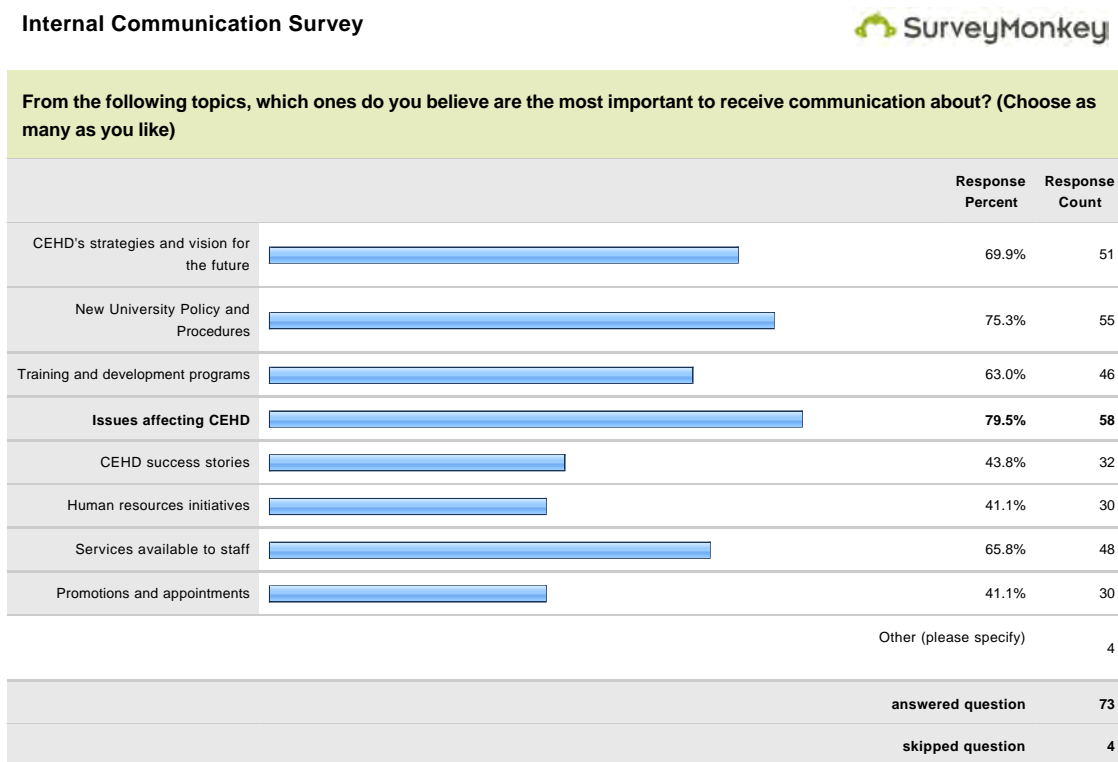
Internal Communication Survey



How would you rate your knowledge of CEHD in the categories below? (Rating: 1 being 'not knowledgeable at all' to 5 being 'highly knowledgeable')						
	1	2	3	4	5	Rating Count
Strategic Direction	16.2% (12)	24.3% (18)	29.7% (22)	21.6% (16)	8.1% (6)	74
Policies and Procedures	2.7% (2)	24.3% (18)	29.7% (22)	35.1% (26)	8.1% (6)	74
Ongoing Accomplishments	1.4% (1)	19.2% (14)	21.9% (16)	45.2% (33)	12.3% (9)	73
Issues facing the College	9.5% (7)	37.8% (28)	27.0% (20)	20.3% (15)	5.4% (4)	74
answered question						74
skipped question						3

When asked about the “Burton Brief”, respondents described it as their main source for internal information for which they read most to all of the content. Other means for which participants receive information included the grapevine and supervisors/managers. Question seven asked what categories respondents feel they need to be informed about (Image 3). Issues facing the college ranked highest with policies and procedures and strategic direction following close behind. Services for staff and information on trainings were also important. College accomplishments fell to sixth out of the eight categories.

(Image 3)

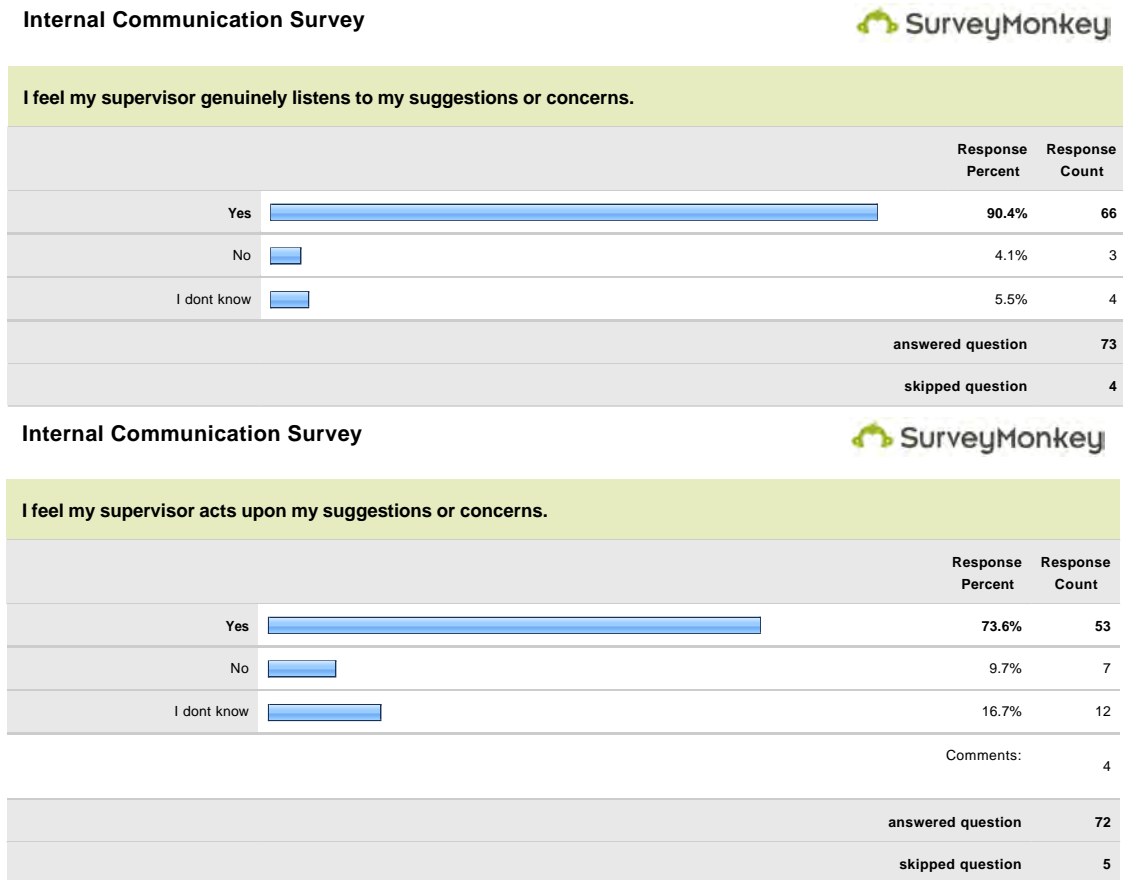


The next three questions focused on a personal communication assessment. The majority of respondents believed good communication skills are important. Almost all respondents believed they were average to highly proficient at

communicating, but answers were distributed evenly when asked if they believed their proficiency level was common amongst their colleagues.

The most promising results came from questions twelve and thirteen

(Image 4)



Respondents indicated they believed their supervisors listen to their concerns and take action over the issues communicated. This information will be strongly taken into consideration in the suggestions for enhancements to the current communication strategy.

Question fourteen indicated high belief in the first two statements, “positive relationships lead to good communication” and “poor communication leads to stress

in my position.” The majority of respondents indicated mid to low agreement to the statement, “I feel connected to other departments in the college”. A similar distribution was seen for the question, “I understand the organizational structure of the college”. Lastly, two demographic questions indicated a nearly 70/30 distribution in women and men with the majority falling between the ages of 25-45. This distribution is fairly representative of the college, which has close to a 60/40 female to male ratio

Additional comments provided by respondents indicated a frustration with the type of information and the level of communication transparency the college provides to its employees. One respondent wrote, “Often there does not seem to be information available from CEHD to the department level re: policies and processes. CEHD often communicates important information by newsletter items only. This means that the reader must always scan the newsletters to ferret out information. I would suggest that CEHD make an attempt to provide information on important items by email. CEHD should be more proactive and transparent in communicating.” Another respondent commented, “Information is often buried in newsletters. CEHD does a better job at sending out info about accomplishments of specific faculty members, but very poor at sending out information about changes, policies and procedures.” These comments many indicate the need for the communications to clearly state the vision and direction of the college and provide more outlets for the dissemination of information and two-way communication practices.

Individuals selected for the interviews and focus groups provided similar comments to those found in the. The interviews represented four employee groups



within the college. Two are members of separate service teams, one is an administrative lead, and the fourth is an office coordinator. Ages ranged from mid thirties to late fifties and gender was equally represented. Relationships, organizational structure and culture were the three common themes describing the areas of improvement in the internal communications strategy of CEHD. The first theme was the importance of relationships amongst colleagues within the college. Referenced by some as a way to connect people across the two campuses and to build trust in the flow of communication, others described relationships as a means to create in-groups and out-groups through which information is withheld or remains exclusive. One interviewee was quoted as saying, “I think [college communications] are more relational, so I think some people are left out of the loop because people higher up don’t know the broad base of who their people might be or who might need the information.” With the college across two campuses, the concept of relationships to maintain cohesion becomes a concern. When asked if the physical divide between the two campuses causes an interruption in communication flow, one interviewee stated, “I don’t know if I see it as an issue of how communication flows, I think its an issue how relationships are built. To me, you have to do the work of building a relationship in order to effectively work, and not having the face time is the biggest problem there.”

The college’s organizational structure was another common theme found in the interviews. In relation to information flow, there were concerns expressed about the misunderstanding from top personnel regarding the work of the lower positions. It was mentioned that good communication must flow both ways but it

seems difficult for the top employees to understand or listen to the concerns or opinions of those below them. Relating to organizational structure was the opinion that administrators should be expected to communicate the necessary information to their employees, yet communication does not appear to take top priority in an administrator’s role. These comments were not meant to criticize the work of CEHD administrators but to indicate the overwhelming and overtaxing duties they are expected to balance. When asked, “how well do you feel you are informed at your level of expectation?” one interviewee replied, “Not very well, my boss is over taxed and I should be told directly but the word doesn’t get to me. I understand that the college is large but I also expect that the college is solidified.”

Lastly, culture was a common theme found in the transcripts. Those interviewed described the culture as quiet, reserved and resistant to change. The slow pace at which decisions are made and information is communicated was also identified as part of the college culture. However, it was also apparent that employees are working to strengthen the culture and direct it towards the vision and mission of the college. In a discussion regarding the level of information disseminated through proper channels, one interviewee stated, “Right now my staff is working on a service level agreement that will go to the departments that lays out the processes for each thing. We are starting over and trying to change that attitude, personality...that is not the word I am thinking about...culture! I think there is a lot of stuff stuck in the past. There are a lot of people who say we didn’t do it that way last year. I think its just a matter of getting people on board to make those changes,

they have to be willing to change.” This statement indicates that the current college culture may be slow to change but there is potential for growth and success.

From the focus group transcripts, similar comments to the ones stated in the one-on-one interviews were recorded while new subjects emerged as well. The organizational structure of the college was mentioned as a means to properly disseminate information, however many agreed there were fundamental issues with the flow of communication. Slow response time and lack of information were the two major criticisms of the current communication strategy. The college culture was also mentioned as lacking accountability. Many of the individuals expressed a desire to receive more official and concrete information from their superiors to provide a clear direction for their actions. With a clear understanding of the vision and direction of the college, the uncertainty and lack of accountability felt by these individuals could be eliminated. Besides commenting on the organizational structure and culture of the college, the participants expressed their opinions of the various communication outlets used by the college. Participants believed that the “Burton Brief” is meant for college promotion while the “Friday Connection” was helpful in providing the action items employees need to meet deadlines and complete tasks yet even the “Friday Connection” came under fire by the participants. Most expressed frustration in receiving partial information or having to seek out their information rather than being presented with all the facts needed to be successful. The fact that the e-newsletter was sent on a Friday, leaving employees only hours to complete urgent tasks, was another criticism of this form of communication. The CEHD intranet, or “Sky”, received good reviews but more

opportunities for two-way symmetrical communication was recommended. Some participants were curious as to the reasoning for the organization of the “Sky” and wished they could provide their input as to what should be posted and where things should be held. Lastly, participant number three mentioned the concept of closed circle communication, which seemed to intrigue other participants. Concentrating mostly on e-mail communication, participant three discussed her procedure of responding within a timely manner to any e-mail received, even if just to say the request has been acknowledged. This practice allows both the sender and receiver to complete the communication cycle and move about their work while simultaneously exchanging responsibility in a clear and respectful manner. Ultimately, the group expressed many opinions related to the questions posed by the researcher and offered helpful information about their procedures and means of communicating to help the other participants involved as well as enrich the research collected.

## Analysis

From the interviews, focus group, and survey results, important insights were gained on the perceived efficacy of the current internal communications strategy and proficiency in communication skills on a personal level. The main takeaways from the interviews and focus group are an observed disconnect amongst all levels of employees and a misunderstanding of the college culture. Information gained about individual communication competency was gathered in the qualitative studies and expanded in the survey, which indicated a need for

effective communication tools. However, the results also indicated areas of strength that can be utilized as a platform for which to improve communications at the college.

Many areas of discussion in the interviews and focus group indicated the perceived disconnect between high-level administrative staff and lower level employees. Most individuals interviewed expressed an opinion of high-level staff as focused on the “big picture” with little understanding of implementation and effects of their decisions on other employees. This relates back to ignorance as a barrier for communication as explained by O’Dell and Grayson (1998). According to the interviewees, information does not travel both up and down the organizational chart as expected, suggesting a number of barriers from lack of security and impression management as described by Cheney (2011), to the lack of preexisting relationships mentioned by O’Dell and Grayson (1998). Other reasons for this perceived disconnect may be a lack of two-way symmetrical communication outlets and low understanding of the organizational chart.

Participants in the interviews and focus group expressed the desire for two-way symmetrical communication yet they did not feel it was the communicative practice of the college. From the analysis of the current communication strategy, almost all outlets are one-way. Face-to-face meetings and bi-annual college events were indicated as the only means for two-way symmetrical communication. According to some participant comments, individual situations have created the perception of two-way symmetrical communication but employee comments go unrecognized. These comments may be situations but can also indicate that two-

way symmetrical communication practices are not understood and there needs to be more standardization or evaluation of these outlets.

The ambiguity surrounding the organizational structure of the college as well as position duties may be another cause for the perceived feeling of disconnect. Survey results, interviews, and the focus group indicated little to moderate understanding of the organizational structure of the college. Being bureaucratic in structure, there are many layers to communication, both top-down and bottom-up. Both upper level management and lower level employees must understand and respect the organization of the college for a strong communication strategy to function. There are many ways to tentatively disrupt and bypass levels in the organization and thereby hinder the college’s success. With a university-wide email system and webpages providing contact information to everyone in the organizational chart, the chain of command and the proper flow of communication becomes clouded. The communication flow and process can be easily abused if an employee completely bypasses a supervisor and expresses concerns and issues in an email to the Dean. It is important for everyone in the college to understand the process of communication and respect the proper channels through which to communicate.

Open access to administrative and high-level staff can also lead to confusion in positional duties, another element to the perceived disconnect amongst employee levels of the college. Those at the lower levels of the organization may believe that administrative staff should be involved with their issues or concerns when in fact their direct supervisors are the individuals for this role. This issue relates to the

importance of understanding and clarifying the hierarchy structure and differentiation of duties as described by Cheney et al (2011). It is important for employees in the college to understand the differences in roles and responsibilities within the hierarchy and gauge the level of formalization within and among these different positions. The higher up in the organization one is positioned, the more strategic the duties become. Simply put, a direct supervisor will be more capable to address immediate issues at a departmental level than the Dean. By following the proper communication channel and understanding the positional duties of the college, issues can be addressed much more efficiently. Not only is it important for employees to understand how communication should properly flow up the hierarchy, those at the top of the organization must understand how to properly communicate information down the organizational structure so all those involved have the correct information to do their jobs well. By providing all employees with a clear explanation of the organizational structure and positional duties as well as conveying to supervisors a communication dissemination process, the organizational disconnect experienced by the interviewees may be mended.

The survey results further highlight the perceived disconnect amongst employee levels of the college, particularly regarding the type of information received and the outlets through which information is transferred. Question five indicated respondents felt knowledgeable about CEHD policies and procedures as well as CHED accomplishments. They did not feel as knowledgeable about the college's strategic direction or issues facing the college. However, when asked in question seven what people felt they needed to be informed about, issues facing the

college was the most important, followed by policies and procedures, and strategic direction. This indicates that the information being communicated by the college may not match up with what the employees wish to hear. Question eight produced interesting results when respondents were asked to indicate where they currently receive information about CEHD. The “Burton Brief” received the highest results, indicating that the main source for employees to learn about the college many not inform them of what they believe is important.

Along with a proper understanding of the organizational structure, the duties and expectations of each level of employees, and the proper methods and type of information to be communicated, a supportive and strong culture is necessary for any organization to succeed. From the results of all three studies, there is a misunderstanding of the culture of the college that is currently creating a barrier to good communication. The culture at CEHD is promoted through the values and visions of the organization as one that enriches, discovers and shares knowledge with all those connected to the college. Unfortunately, barriers to good communication have lead to the perception of the culture at CEHD to be slow and resistant to change. Some participants of the focus group discussed a perceived lack of accountability amongst their colleagues as a cultural issue. Although the survey failed to ask specific questions about the perceived characteristics of the college culture, participant comments mentioned inconsistent and unclear communication practices as aspects of the CEHD culture. Fortunately, suggestions from the interviews and focus groups also show attempts to understand and help direct the culture to bring success to the college. A supportive culture is one that reflects the



values and goals of the organization in every aspect of its activities. It is evident through all three studies that a clear vision and direction of the college will help shape the culture to bring success and longevity to the activities and growth of all employees and the organization as a whole.

From the focus group and interviews, participants believed they practiced good communication techniques but believed both their peers or the college culture did not do this. Questions nine through eleven drew upon the elements presented in the Theory of Planned Behavior to discover respondents level of intent to communicate effectively within the college. Responses indicated that the majority of participants believe good communication is very important to their success and almost all respondents believed they were average to good at communicating effectively. However, when asked about the level of communication proficiency across the college, the responses were varied. Although this information may indicate a problem with the question, it may also signify a misperception of the social norm when it comes to communication proficiency. If an individual believes the social norm of the college does not support effective communication, or if they do not know what the social norm is, they may be less inclined to exhibit effective communication techniques.

Notwithstanding the various indications for improvement, optimistic information was discovered in all three studies. From the survey, the majority of respondents ranked the college’s communication strategy as fairly informative and believed they are informed at average or above average expectation levels. Besides the “Burton Brief” the second and third more common forms of communication

were through the grapevine and from supervisors. This indicates that face-to-face communication is frequently occurring and, with some direction, can be a strong source for good communication practices to come. Respondents also indicated that their supervisors both listen to their suggestions or concerns and take action upon that information. Participants in the interviews and focus group believed they were strong communicators and were happy to provide their successful techniques to help their peers. It was this very interest and collaboration by participants as well as the support from the Dean that signifies a desire to discuss and improve communication within the college. Support and participation in this study indicates an intention from every level of the college to strengthen the success of the organization. It is the college administration and employees who will ultimately determine the success of a communication strategy and it appears they are ready for improvements.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

The strongest limitations in the research are due to time constraints and the convenience sample the researcher used to collect data. Interviewees were contacted from a list of personal acquaintances. Although the researcher made a strong effort to remain neutral while conducting the interviews, the personal connections and shared experiences may have affected the results. The survey was distributed to personal contacts within CEHD with the encouragement to disseminate the link to others within the college. With a limited amount of time to collect data, the survey was closed after reaching seventy-four respondents. This

number was about twenty-five percent less than the goal for this research and represents only about eight percent of the entire employee pool of 1,279 individuals. Although interviewing individuals within a range of positions and hierarchy within the college was somewhat achieved, more interviews representative of the organizational structure of the college would have been conducted, if time permitted. These two limitations were either caused or expected by the researcher, however another limitation occurred while conducting the research that led to further analysis of the CEHD internal communication process.

Approximately a week after the survey was created and sent to contacts for responses, the link was sent via e-mail to the directors of the departments upon the recommendation of the Dean’s assistant. Two days after the email was sent, the Dean’s assistant asked for all communication regarding the survey to be stopped due to complaints from personnel within the college. The request was upheld and the survey closed one week later. The negative reaction to the email indicated low receptivity of some employees to communication from colleagues within the college. The quality and consistence of good communication throughout the college will be hindered if those receiving it are not open to the information provided. Testing the receptivity of certain information may be an area of interest in future research.

Beyond the capstone, future research could include more survey or interview questions regarding the types of relationships built amongst employees or the level of stress caused by poor communication. Employee relationships were a common theme discussed in all three studies. It may be beneficial for the college to analyze the types of relationships being built within the college and how to foster more

positive relationships with all personnel. Another area of interest and future research could be the correlation between stress and poor communication. In question fourteen, the majority of respondents indicated that poor communication leads to stress in their job. A better understanding of the levels of stress experienced by employees due to communication problems could provide further reasoning to enhance the communication initiative for the college.

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

From the results of this study, it is recommended that the current communication strategy receive some enhancements to not only improve the dissemination of information and provide clear communication pathways but to also enrich the college culture through the vision and goals of CEHD. The enhanced communication strategy will use the mission statement of the college as the foundation through which it will establish more outlets for two-way symmetrical communication, provide a clear outline of the organizational structure of the college and proper channels for communication, and create tools to improve individual proficiency. Not only will this strategy improve communication within the college but also direct the culture to exhibit responsibility, efficiency and openness to better support the vision of CEHD. Before these enhancements can begin, it is important to have the understanding and support of the administrative staff behind every aspect of this endeavor. To ensure their support, meetings will be held to discuss the results and suggestions and answer any questions that may arise. Without full support of the administrative staff, this project will not be successful.

Implementation of this new endeavor will consist of an awareness campaign and a training program to encourage stronger communication and provide a better understanding of the college organization. The training program will be introduced in three parts and will take approximately fifteen months to complete. It is the full intent of this proposal to evaluate, update and re-implement this program every fifteen-months to continue the success of the strategy. Appendix C provides a visual representation of the proposed strategy. This will be a large endeavor to take on but CEHD employees seem up for the task.

The foundation for which an enhanced CEHD communication strategy will be structured upon is the mission statement of the college: *The College of Education and Human Development is a world leader in discovering, creating, sharing, and applying principles and practices of multiculturalism and multidisciplinary scholarship to advance teaching and learning and to enhance the psychological, physical, and social development of children, youth, and adults across the lifespan in families, organizations, and communities.* According to Mark Chong (2007), a successful internal communication strategy “must instill the values of an organization in the hearts and minds of employees, to enhance [organization] supporting behaviors.” (Chong, 2007, pg. 202) From this mission statement, two elements will be emphasized in the language and structure of the strategy. The keywords found in the first portion of the mission statement, discovering, creating, sharing, and applying, will be used frequently to establish an open communication system and empower employees to apply the tools they are provided to advance their work at the college and create a collaborative environment in which ideas and experiences

are easily shared. The communication strategy will also be a means to “enhance the psychological, physical, and social development” of CEHD employees. By embodying the mission statement in the structure and language of the communication strategy, employees will begin promote the mission of the college in their communication efforts and work ethic.

The outlets developed by the current communication strategy will be the main sources of communication for the enhanced strategy yet new features and a clear explanation of the purpose of each outlet will be provided. The “Burton Brief” will continue to be a one-way asymmetrical piece of communication that will be re-structured to promote the key themes of the CEHD mission. The “Friday Connection” will begin to be managed by the communications team and receive a new name to better align with the communication strategy and the mission of the college. Every employee will be opted into this list upon their hire due to the valuable information it sends every wee. As a major source of information for many employees, the new “Friday Connection” will be released on a Tuesday to provide three workdays to accomplish important action items. The email will also provide a link to a blog housed on the CEHD intranet for employees to voice their concerns, tips and other helpful information as a means to foster more two-way symmetrical communication. The communications team who will work with service departments to help address comments in a timely manner will manage this blog. The CEHD intranet will remain the main source of college wide information and a tutorial of its organization will be provided in stage one of the training. The communication page on the intranet will drastically expand to include all the materials and procedures

presented in the training program and a detailed outline and timeline for the strategy will be made available. Materials from stage one of the training program will also be included in the CEHD leadership page and information describing the cultural values the college wishes to strengthen. To create a monitored two-way symmetrical mode of communication, a comment box will be added to the intranet home page so employees can provide input, tips, and ideas for new materials and procedures to help with the efficiency and success of the college. These comments will be monitored daily by the communications team and suggestions will be discussed in weekly meetings. The bi-annual college wide meetings will continue to be a two-way asymmetrical communication method but an emphasis on the enhanced communication strategy, the improvement of the college culture and recognition of good communicators will help promote and strengthen the success of the strategy. Lastly, supervisors will be provided tools in stage two of the training program to improve the success and productivity of staff meetings and further enrich the already established two-way symmetrical mode of communication.

Beyond the outlets used by the communication staff, supervisors will be designated as communication conduits for their team. Research results indicated strong respect and efficacy of supervisors in communication roles. Therefore, CEHD supervisors will be relied upon to promote the awareness campaign and exercise communication practices learned in the training program as well as hold meetings to allow two-way communication and the dissemination of information flow in the proper manner. The college will strongly rely on these valuable individuals

throughout this endeavor to strengthen communications and help the college succeed in its efforts.

The improved communication strategy will be implemented via an awareness campaign and a three-part training program. The campaign is a means to gain support and recognition for the strategy while the training program provides the tools and knowledge necessary to effectively apply the strategy. An official e-letter from the Dean to all employees will be the first announcement of the new initiative. E-mail was chosen as the format for this letter due to its high reach and visibility with employees of the college. With this letter, the Dean will clearly establish her authority as the head of the college who has identified an important issue and is providing a solution to minimize it for the good of her staff. The mission statement will be clearly presented along with a clear description and rationale for enhancing the strategy. A timeline for the training program will be presented to eliminate uncertainty and set high standards of expectations from employees. Ultimately, this letter will be written to empower employees and encourage them to be a willing participant in an exciting new project to improve their current environment and advance their skills as a valuable member of the college.

After the first announcement from the Dean, the awareness campaign for the new developments of the communication strategy will use the updated communication outlets to provide reminders, promote the new endeavor and infuse the mission statement into the communication efforts of the college. It will become the overarching theme for the communication outlets used by the college. This campaign must make the clear connection between the mission statement and the



improvements of the enhanced communication strategy and promote the efforts to enhance the college culture. Detailed and clear information about the training program will also be promoted to eliminate skepticism and ambiguity.

The training program will occur simultaneously with the launch of this campaign and will support the enhanced internal communication strategy in each of its three steps. The first part of the training program will be a series of group tutorials to learn about the organizational structure of the college, general descriptions of job duties, and the proper flow of communication to help eliminate the misunderstandings indicated in the research study. Appendix D provides a visual representation of the organizational structure of CEHD. For this part of the training, it is suggested that the organizational chart is expanded to the departmental and center level to allow employees to make connections to those in similar positions.

Designed to promote unity and understanding of all aspects of the college, this part of the training program will embody the theme “discovery”, a keyword found in the CEHD mission statement. These meetings will strive to empower employees and allow them to discover and learn valuable information about the college and their colleagues together in one room. Study results indicated a disconnect between upper and lower employees, the communications team will work to provide a diverse set of personnel in each meeting to allow for relationships and communication amongst different levels of the hierarchy. After the meetings are complete an online module will be provided for review and assessment. The communications team will be charged with the task of creating and running the

tutorials while the technical staff will be recruited to create an interactive and appealing online tool. Once an employee has attended the meeting and reviewed all information, they will be presented with an online assessment to measure their level of understanding. This assessment will not only evaluate the individual’s knowledge, but will also provide valuable information as to the success of the training program itself. If an employee scores eighty percent or higher they will receive a certificate of completion. The goal of this stage is to have a ninety percent completion rate within one month of the launch. Desired outcomes include visibly improved communications through the use of proper channels as revealed through results from randomly surveyed CEHD supervisors.

The second part of the training program will consist of face-to-face group meetings with members of the communication team or professional trainers to provide specialized communication tools. This stage is a more targeted and two-way symmetrical approach to improve individual communication proficiency and further strengthen the college culture. Elements of the mission statement that will be promoted in this stage are the keyword share, as well as the statement, “to enhance the psychological, physical, and social development of [adults].” Each meeting will emphasize their importance in the development of each employee on a social, physical and psychological level as well as establish an environment where employees are comfortable sharing their own experiences and tips. As suggested by Welch and Jackson, classes will hold a maximum of thirty people and be divided into three communication groups to service three important employee groups: high-level supervisors and administrators, mid-level supervisors, and lower level

employees. Each group will have a selection of trainings to choose from, specifically tailored to the needs of their position. For example, lower level employees or faculty members without any supervisory roles may select from a training on the importance and practice of closed loop communication as discussed in the focus group or on successful techniques to communicate with supervisors and fellow employees. Mid-level supervisors may be offered trainings on the delegation and confrontation conversation models described by Halley Bock of Fierce Inc. (2012) or on successful ways to structure and manage a productive staff meeting. High-level supervisor and administrative staff may be able to choose from a training session on the coaching conversational model described by Bock (2012) or a training on successful information dissemination tips explained by O'Dell and Grayson (1998), amongst other options. All employees must choose and attend at least one of the trainings within their designated communication group within six months of the launch of stage two. Completion of the training will be granted after a score of eighty percent or above is earned on the final assessment. Those who earn high scores, exhibit high participation in sessions, or complete more than one training session within their communication group will be recognized as strong communicators in CEHD and an incentive may be provided. Materials from all the trainings will be posted on the updated CEHD communication intranet page for all to access and implement into their communication routine. The measurable goal outcome of this stage is to have every employee successfully complete at least one training session within six months. Desired outcomes include at least twenty-five percent of employees choosing to complete more than one training session within their

category along with an increased number of supervisors indicating an improvement in employee communication.

In addition to the trainings, supervisors will be asked to hold inter-office meetings to bring their employees together to discuss what they learned and offer suggestions on how to improve communications in their office. These meetings will be a helpful way to establish stronger employee relationships and create an outlet of two-way symmetrical communication.

The last stage of the training program includes evaluation, assessment and follow-up training of employees. Using the phrase “applying principles and practices” from the mission statement the communications team will use a variety of techniques to complete this stage. The evaluation will begin two months after all employees have completed stage two. This evaluation may be conducted via a confidential survey as well as randomly conducted office observations to obtain data on the implementation of new communication techniques and means of enhancing the college culture. Beyond the implementation of the new communication techniques, the communications team will also issue a survey to all employees to gauge their impression of the college culture, communication efforts and their own communication proficiency after completing the entire training program. Communication team members will also interview randomly selected employees to gain a deeper understanding of improvements or areas that need further attention. Open forums will be held to for employees to discuss their opinions and experiences with the enhanced communication strategy as well as how well they have adapted and embodied the college strategy and culture. The updated

outlets for communication will be evaluated to determine if new features are used as intended and whether the outlets themselves are functioning as designed. This evaluation stage is very important as it determines the success of employees as well as the program itself to ensure its sustainability as a long-term program. After this stage, the program would restart, with employees required to complete stages one and two again. Stage one will be updated to include any changes in the organizational chart and stage two would provide new or updated trainings. It is very important that this training program continue to refresh and evolve with the changes and needs of the college and that each employee continues to improve and learn new ways to be good communicators.

This program is an extensive undertaking that will require major effort and support from CEHD administration as well as every employee of the college. With this new initiative, the communications department would benefit in hiring an internal communications team dedicated to the development, implementation, and maintenance of this new endeavor. Costs may also include hiring trainers and purchasing copyrights to communication materials used in stage two training sessions. This enhanced communication strategy and training program is not a small task and will require a significant budget but the benefits could save the college in wasted time and discouraged employees. The College of Education and Human Development has the opportunity to be at the forefront of what could become a University strategy for good communication techniques and improved college culture.

Like Phil Rabinowitz (2013) stated, “internal communications is the lifeblood of any organization.” (Pg. 1) Just as blood cells flow through veins to provide an organism with vital nutrients, internal communications flows through every part of an organization to provide vital information. If arteries become clogged, the blood will not flow and the organism will suffer. Barriers to communication can prevent employees from obtaining fundamental information that ultimately affects the success of the organization. It is extremely important to understand and support a strong and successful internal communications strategy for the sake of the employees and the organization at large. The College of Education and Human Development has a unique opportunity to reflect upon its current internal communication strategy to improve the flow, provide employees with the nutrients they need, and come out of the process with a much stronger heartbeat.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Capstone Communication E-mails

Interview E-mail,

Good \_\_\_\_\_,

As a second year Strategic Communication graduate student I must complete a capstone project for graduation. For this project I have decided to evaluate the internal communication strategy of the College of Education and Human Development. I would greatly appreciate your insight as a \_\_\_\_\_ at CEHD and would like to conduct a one-on-one interview with you at your convenience. All information discussed in this interview will be used strictly for my project and personal information will be completely confidential. Please let me know if you are willing to participate and I will contact you with possible days for us to meet. Thank you very much for your time and have a great day!

Thank you,  
Kelly Valusek

Good \_\_\_\_\_,

As a second year Strategic Communication graduate student I must complete a capstone project for graduation. For this project I have decided to evaluate the internal communication strategy of the College of Education and Human Development. I would greatly appreciate your insight as a \_\_\_\_\_ at CEHD and would like as you to participate in a one-hour focus group. These meetings will be held from 12:00-1:00 at the STEM Education Center conference room and lunch will be provided. All information discussed in this interview will be used strictly for my project and personal information will be completely confidential. Please let me know if you are willing to participate and I will contact you with possible days for you to choose from. Thank you very much for your time and have a great day!

Thank you,  
Kelly Valusek

## Survey Introduction

Good \_\_\_\_\_,

As a second year Strategic Communication graduate student I must complete a capstone project for graduation. For this project I have decided to evaluate the internal communication strategy of the College of Education and Human Development.

I am sending you the link to my brief, 15-question survey to aid in my data collection. All information collected in this survey will be used strictly for my project and personal information is completely confidential.

If you have any questions, please feel free to e-mail or call me. I thank you very much for your time and I hope you have a great day!

Link: \_\_\_\_\_



Thank you,  
Kelly Valusek

# Appendix B







## Internal Communication Survey



**1. Are you an employee of the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota- Twin Cities?**

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		96.1%	74
No		3.9%	3
I don't know		0.0%	0
		<b>answered question</b>	<b>77</b>
		<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

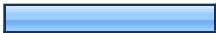


## 2. What position do you hold as an employee of the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Faculty		10.8%	8
Civil Service		17.6%	13
Union-Represented Staff		9.5%	7
<b>Academic Professional/Administrative Staff</b>		<b>45.9%</b>	<b>34</b>
Graduate Assistant		14.9%	11
Undergraduate Academic Assistant		0.0%	0
Student Employee		1.4%	1
I do not know		0.0%	0
I do not wish to disclose		0.0%	0
Other (please specify)			1
<b>answered question</b>			<b>74</b>
<b>skipped question</b>			<b>3</b>

## 3. Which of the following best describes your impression of internal communications at CEHD? (Rating: 1 being 'not informative at all' to 5 being 'highly informative')

	1	2	3	4	5	Rating Average	Rating Count
	2.7% (2)	13.5% (10)	<b>43.2% (32)</b>	32.4% (24)	8.1% (6)	3.30	74
<b>answered question</b>							<b>74</b>
<b>skipped question</b>							<b>3</b>

#### 4. How useful do you find the information you receive from the College of Education and Human Development?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Very useful		31.5%	23
<b>Somewhat useful</b>		<b>65.8%</b>	<b>48</b>
Not useful at all		2.7%	2

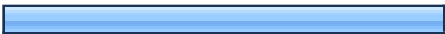







Comments: 7

answered question	73
skipped question	4









#### 5. How would you rate your knowledge of CEHD in the categories below? (Rating: 1 being 'not knowledgeable at all' to 5 being 'highly knowledgeable')

	1	2	3	4	5	Rating Count
Strategic Direction	16.2% (12)	24.3% (18)	<b>29.7% (22)</b>	21.6% (16)	8.1% (6)	74
Policies and Procedures	2.7% (2)	24.3% (18)	29.7% (22)	<b>35.1% (26)</b>	8.1% (6)	74
Ongoing Accomplishments	1.4% (1)	19.2% (14)	21.9% (16)	<b>45.2% (33)</b>	12.3% (9)	73
Issues facing the College	9.5% (7)	<b>37.8% (28)</b>	27.0% (20)	20.3% (15)	5.4% (4)	74
answered question						74
skipped question						3

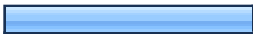



**6. Where do you currently receive information about what is occurring at CEHD? (Choose as many as you like)**

		Response Percent	Response Count
The grapevine/informal networks		66.2%	49
My Supervisor/Manager		58.1%	43
Departmental intranet		21.6%	16
All-staff/Faculty events		41.9%	31
Staff meetings/forums		48.6%	36
CEHD website		33.8%	25
<b>Burton Brief e-newsletter</b>		<b>87.8%</b>	<b>65</b>
Other All-staff emails		37.8%	28
Other (please specify)			5
answered question			74
skipped question			3

**7. From the following topics, which ones do you believe are the most important to receive communication about? (Choose as many as you like)**

		<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
CEHD's strategies and vision for the future		69.9%	51
New University Policy and Procedures		75.3%	55
Training and development programs		63.0%	46
<b>Issues affecting CEHD</b>		<b>79.5%</b>	<b>58</b>
CEHD success stories		43.8%	32
Human resources initiatives		41.1%	30
Services available to staff		65.8%	48
Promotions and appointments		41.1%	30
Other (please specify)			4
		<b>answered question</b>	<b>73</b>
		<b>skipped question</b>	<b>4</b>

## 8. How much of the internal e-newsletter "Burton Brief" do you read?

		Response Percent	Response Count
All of it		37.0%	27
Most of it		31.5%	23
Some of it		26.0%	19
I choose not to read it		5.5%	4
I didn't know we had an internal e-newsletter		0.0%	0

Other (please specify) 4

answered question 73

skipped question 4

## 9. How important do you believe communication is to being successful in your position?

	Unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Neutral	Somewhat important	Very important	Rating Average	Rating Count
	1.4% (1)	1.4% (1)	11.0% (8)	17.8% (13)	68.5% (50)	4.51	

answered question

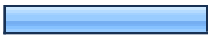


skipped question






**10. How proficient are you at communicating within your position? (Rating: 1 being 'poor' to 5 being 'excellent')**

	1	2	3	4	5	Rating Average	Rating Count
	0.0% (0)	1.4% (1)	20.5% (15)	<b>60.3% (44)</b>	17.8% (13)	3.95	73
answered question							73
skipped question							4



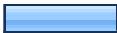
**11. Do you believe your level of communication proficiency is common amongst others throughout the College?**

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		30.1%	22
No		34.2%	25
I dont know		35.6%	26
Other (please specify)			4
answered question			73
skipped question			4

**12. I feel my supervisor genuinely listens to my suggestions or concerns.**

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		90.4%	66
No		4.1%	3
I dont know		5.5%	4
answered question			73
skipped question			4



### 13. I feel my supervisor acts upon my suggestions or concerns.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		73.6%	53
No		9.7%	7
I dont know		16.7%	12
Comments:			4
answered question			72
skipped question			5








### 14. Please indicate your level of agreement on the following statements (Rating: 1 being 'strongly disagree' to 5 being 'strongly agree')

	1	2	3	4	5	Rating Count
Positive relationships lead to good communication	0.0% (0)	1.4% (1)	16.4% (12)	31.5% (23)	<b>50.7% (37)</b>	73
Poor communication leads to stress in my position	0.0% (0)	13.7% (10)	5.5% (4)	20.5% (15)	<b>60.3% (44)</b>	73
I feel connected to other departments in the college	20.5% (15)	21.9% (16)	<b>31.5% (23)</b>	23.3% (17)	2.7% (2)	73
I understand the organizational structure of the college	2.7% (2)	16.4% (12)	<b>32.9% (24)</b>	30.1% (22)	17.8% (13)	73
answered question						73
skipped question						4

## 15. What is your gender?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Male		31.0%	22
Female		69.0%	49
answered question			71
skipped question			6

## 16. What is your age?

		Response Percent	Response Count
18-24		1.5%	1
25-31		17.6%	12
32-38		23.5%	16
39-45		23.5%	16
46-52		7.4%	5
53-59		14.7%	10
60+		11.8%	8
answered question			68
skipped question			9

**Page 2, Q2. What position do you hold as an employee of the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities?**

1	also administrator in the dean's office	Apr 22, 2013 6:22 AM
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**Page 4, Q4. How useful do you find the information you receive from the College of Education and Human Development?**

1	The college report and burton brief are sometimes repetitive	Apr 23, 2013 7:13 AM
2	the burton brief along with unit newsletters keeps me informed	Apr 22, 2013 6:24 AM
3	I would like to see greater variety of departments represented in the "staff news" sections.	Apr 16, 2013 12:59 PM
4	Often there does not seem to be information available from CEHD to the department level re: policies and procedures. Departments are left to their own devices to create and implement processes. CEHD often communicates important information by newsletter items only. This means that the reader must always scan the newsletters to ferret out information. I would suggest that CEHD make an attempt to provide information on important items by email. CEHD should be more proactive and transparent in communicating.	Apr 15, 2013 1:04 PM
5	I normally scan items that may be important to me and my job	Apr 15, 2013 11:24 AM
6	Depends on what department/center it comes from.	Apr 15, 2013 10:59 AM
7	unnecessary CEHD emails about selling stuff. We can choose to unsubscribe	Apr 15, 2013 10:31 AM

**Page 6, Q6. Where do you currently receive information about what is occurring at CEHD? (Choose as many as you like)**

1	various newsletters (e.g., CEHD centers, MCRR, etc.)	Apr 22, 2013 6:20 PM
2	Via ADAC and The Loop Newsletter	Apr 22, 2013 7:32 AM
3	I am a rep on the CEHD Governing Council and CEHD Staff Council	Apr 17, 2013 7:20 AM
4	Information is often buried in newsletters. CEHD does a better job at sending out info about accomplishments of specific faculty members, but very poor at sending out information about changes, policies and procedures.	Apr 15, 2013 1:06 PM
5	Friday Connection, SKY	Apr 15, 2013 11:00 AM

**Page 7, Q7. From the following topics, which ones do you believe are the most important to receive communication about? (Choose as many as you like)**

1	CEHD Awards and outside of CEHD and the U communities	Apr 22, 2013 7:33 AM
2	CEHD resources and systems to support dept/center work (e.g. data support, international scholar support. Also, how depts and centers handle aspects of operations so there is consistency and synergy.	Apr 17, 2013 7:28 AM
3	In order to do my job, I would most like information on actual policies and procedures. I am also interested in CEHD strategies and vision for the future, but that is not as important as the info I need to do my job on a daily basis. We already hear about CEHD success stories, promotions and appointments. CEHD needs to focus more on helping us do our jobs consistently, efficiently and with adequate information.	Apr 15, 2013 1:13 PM
4	Employment opportunities	Apr 15, 2013 10:32 AM

**Page 8, Q8. How much of the internal e-newsletter "Burton Brief" do you read?**

1	But I skim quickly for headings/areas of interest	Apr 23, 2013 7:15 AM
2	It seems mostly geared to promote the Dean's interest in iPad apps and in touting CEHD accomplishments. It is not geared toward providing real pertinent information for employees within the College.	Apr 15, 2013 1:14 PM
3	I scan it - not really reading	Apr 15, 2013 11:28 AM
4	Scan for anything relevant	Apr 15, 2013 11:01 AM

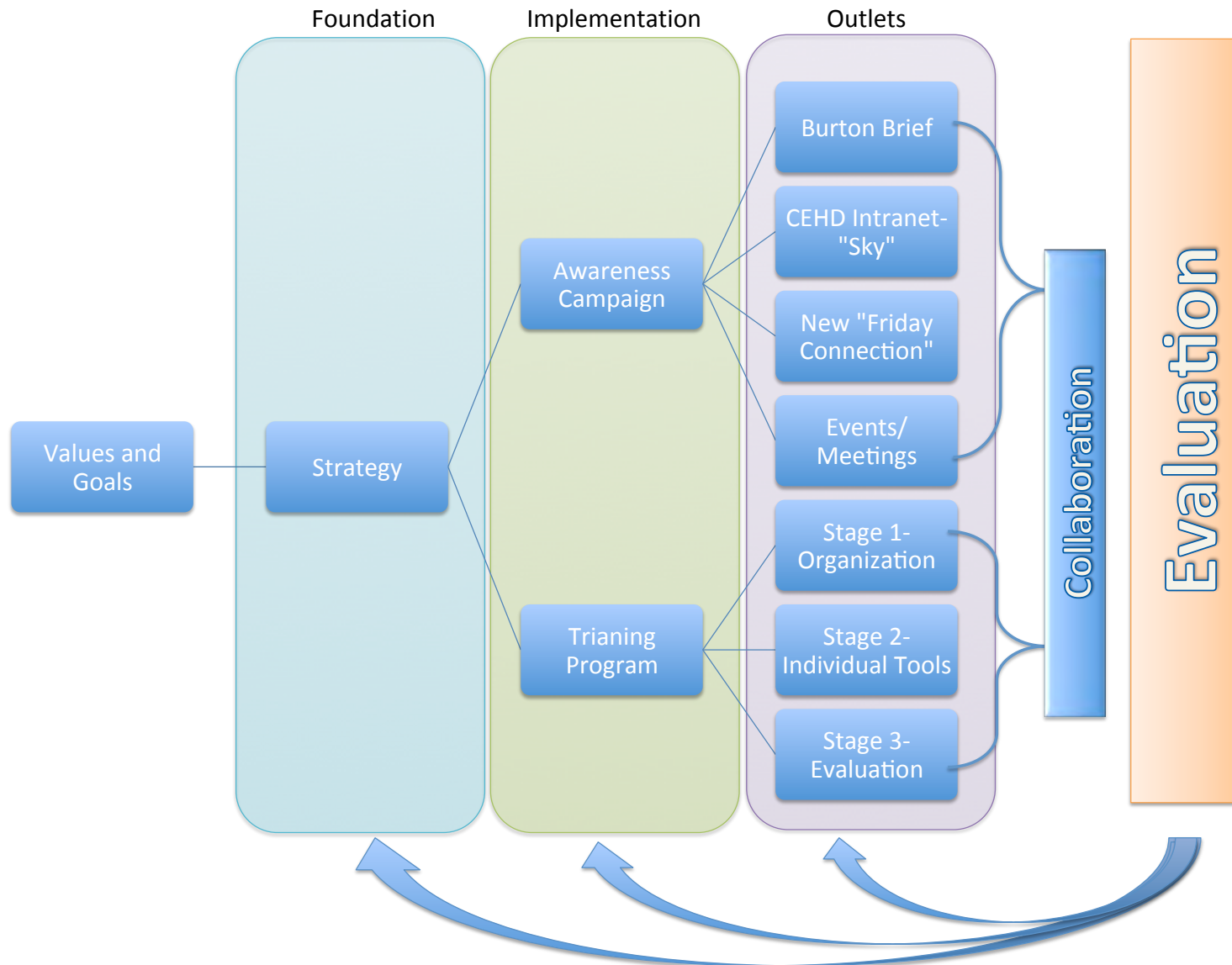
**Page 9, Q11. Do you believe your level of communication proficiency is common amongst others throughout the College?**

1	But it is very department/center focused	Apr 23, 2013 7:17 AM
2	I think I am at a higher level	Apr 22, 2013 8:43 AM
3	I cannot control what others percieve as my level of communication is.	Apr 22, 2013 7:34 AM
4	I am sure others are very capable of good communication. However, there doesn't seem to be a culture of communication here in CEHD. Sometimes it seems that the College wants to remain "under the radar" and doesn't want to be at the forefront of guiding departments in a consistent and efficient manner. I don't know if it is because CEHD is understaffed, but there seems to be avoidance of consistent, clear and proactive communication.	Apr 15, 2013 1:19 PM

**Page 10, Q13. I feel my supervisor acts upon my suggestions or concerns.**

1	Or others above him don't let him act on suggestions	Apr 22, 2013 8:01 AM
2	There have been multiple times that my concerns are genuinely listened to but there is no result in change, no implementation of change, no clarification of the current system policies and procedures already in place.	Apr 22, 2013 7:37 AM
3	sometimes. depends on the issue	Apr 22, 2013 6:26 AM
4	Frequently but not always. Sometimes they are dismissed.	Apr 17, 2013 7:31 AM

## Appendix C



# Appendix D

September 13, 2012 **Organization Chart**

**CEHD** | College of Education + Human Development

